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President: Mr. Oh Joon ..... (Republic of Korea)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters (*continued*) (E/2016/L.14)

Draft decision E/2016/L.14: Theme for the humanitarian affairs segment of the 2016 session of the Economic and Social Council

1. **The President** said that the draft decision had no programme budget implications.

2. *Draft decision E/2016/L.14 was adopted.*

Special meeting on the impacts of the 2015/16 El Niño phenomenon: reducing risks and capturing opportunities

Opening of the special meeting

3. **The President** said that many developing countries in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Pacific were currently suffering the devastating and far-reaching consequences of the most extreme El Niño event on record. Drought conditions had led the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau to declare states of emergency and Malawi to declare a state of disaster. As at February 2016, almost a million children in Eastern and Southern Africa had required treatment for acute malnutrition as a result of food shortages. The purpose of the present meeting was to examine the health, socioeconomic and environmental dimensions of the El Niño phenomenon and share experiences in reducing its impact.

4. Extreme weather events caused drought, wildfires, disease, displacement and the destruction of agricultural products around the world, which had a negative impact on commodity prices, livelihoods and prospects for sustainable development. Climate change was causing such events to occur more frequently. It was therefore important for the United Nations, international and regional organizations, civil society, the private sector and the scientific community to take coordinated action to build capacity for risk management and prevent El Niño events from resulting in humanitarian crises.

5. **Mr. Glasser** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction), speaking via video link from Mexico, said that the current El Niño had affected an estimated 60 million people to date. Some countries had seen flooding as a result of increased precipitation, while others had experienced severe drought affecting crop yields, livestock production and the availability of drinking water. The proportional impact of El Niño was highest in affected low-income countries and small island developing States, where El Niño had had a significant socioeconomic impact. It should be noted that there was a strong chance of a La Niña event beginning later in 2016. In the past, such events had had a serious impact on food security in developing countries. It was thought that climate change could potentially increase the frequency and severity of El Niño and La Niña events, although further research was needed in that area.

6. On a positive note, the fact that weather was easier to predict in years in which El Niño or La Niña events occurred meant that countries had more opportunity to manage the associated risks and effects. To reduce the negative impacts of those events, seasonal forecasts and risk data should be used to inform decision-making and provide actionable guidance. Many States had taken measures to prepare for the 2015/16 El Niño. For example, El Salvador had distributed drought- and rust-resistant coffee plants and trained producers in the use of irrigation techniques, the Philippines had prepared a road map for addressing El Niño which included cloud seeding, seed distribution and the promotion of crop diversification and water-saving, Malawi was increasing its social safety nets and Angola had begun to revitalize its health services to better combat diseases such as yellow fever and malaria that occurred more frequently during periods of wet weather.

7. The current El Niño had highlighted the shortage of resources available for preparing for and reducing the impacts of such events. There was a need for greater investment in long-term efforts to provide climate services that reduced the risks and increased local and national preparedness and resilience. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, in combination with the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement, provided a way forward for dealing with future El Niño events and other climate-related risks.

8. **Ms. Manaenkova** (World Meteorological Organization (WMO)), speaking via video link from Geneva, said that the World Meteorological Organization had established a large number of centres and mechanisms around the world to provide reliable

global, regional and national climate data. In response to the unprecedented global interest in the El Niño phenomenon in 1997 and 1998, WMO had begun to issue regular updates providing a consensus-based assessment of the situation and an outlook for the coming months. Those updates were developed in collaboration with a number of agencies and experts around the world.

9. While scientific understanding of El Niño had increased greatly in recent years, it was not possible to predict how the dramatic climate change that had occurred since 1998 would interact with the current El Niño or future events. Nevertheless, the vast and growing body of knowledge was providing policy-makers with early warning of potential risks in their countries and regions. Since each region of the world had its own quasi-autonomous atmospheric and ocean processes that could weaken or strengthen the impact of weather events, or provide early indications of their eventual effects, it was important for regional and national forecasters to have the capacity to take local conditions into account when interpreting information issued at the global level. Building on the success of the El Niño and La Niña updates, WMO had undertaken a new initiative to develop a much broader global climate forecast.

10. The next WMO El Niño and La Niña update was expected to be released in mid-May 2016. It would likely state that the previously strong 2015/16 El Niño was rapidly weakening but would be likely to influence climate patterns until mid-2016 and that there would be an El Niño-neutral period in May 2016 followed by an increase in La Niña development in the third quarter of the year.

11. Climate services, disaster risk reduction and capacity development were strategic priorities for WMO. It was extremely important for Governments to support their national meteorological and hydrometeorological services, in particular those services that were not currently able to access, use and provide relevant information on climate impacts and those that were hosting centres assisting other States.

12. *A brief video presentation by the World Meteorological Organization on the causes of the El Niño phenomenon, the impact of the 2015/16 El Niño thus far and the unpredictable interaction of El Niño and climate change followed.*

13. **Mr. Benitez Ramos** (Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation, Peru), delivering the keynote address, said that the experience of his country demonstrated the importance of creating a culture of prevention. His Government had taken early action to prepare for the current El Niño with a view to avoiding a recurrence of the situation in 1997/98, when El Niño had led to losses of around 1 per cent of the gross domestic product. First, the Government had acquired a significant amount of additional equipment in 2014 that would enable the defence, police and security forces to better prepare for the severe weather. In July 2015 the Government had declared a preventive state of emergency in 14 of the country's regions so that preventive measures could be taken to protect the country against the forecasted El Niño. A Council of Ministers, led by the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation, had been established to implement a $680 million plan including action in the agricultural, health, education and transport sectors, within a time frame of around five months. The plan had involved the regional, national and local governments working in a coordinated manner to prepare the population. That approach had been extremely successful; the effects of the current El Niño had been less severe than expected. In sum, Peru had been able to minimize the negative impacts of the current El Niño by taking early action based on the available information, establishing a structure that made it possible to effectively organize efforts and prepare the population and ensuring that sufficient resources had been budgeted for preparation and recovery.

14. *A brief video describing specific risk prevention and mitigation measures that had been undertaken in Peru ahead of the 2015/16 El Niño was shown.*

Interactive panel discussion

15. **Ms. Falk** (CBS News), moderator, said that weather-related events had been responsible for 90 per cent of all disasters that had occurred in the past 20 years and caused between $250 billion and $300 billion of economic losses annually. She expressed sympathy to the Government of Canada in connection with the current wildfires in Alberta, which appeared to be related to El Niño.

16. It was important to understand the El Niño phenomenon within the broader context of the increase in natural disasters and climate-related risks and to consider how the implementation of the Sustainable

Development Goals, the Sendai Framework and the Paris Agreement would increase resilience to El Niño.

17. Noting that Ethiopia was experiencing its worst drought in 50 years as a result of the 2015/16 El Niño, she asked what the economic, social and environmental impact had been on that country.

18. **Mr. Kassa** (Commissioner for Disaster Risk Management, Ethiopia), panellist, said that the drought had led to the loss of crops and livestock, leaving 10.2 million Ethiopians dependant on food aid. The water, education and nutrition sectors were all affected. The Government had put in place effective and efficient measures to combat the effects of the phenomenon and had allocated $381 million to provide food for affected populations, as the initial response from the international community had not been promising. An interministerial disaster prevention and preparedness committee had been established to run the national aid operation. The approach of using the existing government health, education, agriculture, water and irrigation structures to deliver assistance to those affected had proved to be effective.

19. The development of his country depended on the implementation of the Joint Government and Humanitarian Partners' Document, which was a guiding document for the mobilization and use of resources. His country's adoption of the "Delivering as one" initiative meant that there was now no duplication of effort in humanitarian and development work. The strong leadership of his Government had facilitated effective cooperation between Government ministries, United Nations agencies, international and local non-governmental organizations and other partners.

20. **Ms. Falk** (CBS News) asked to what extent small island States had been affected by the 2015/16 El Niño phenomenon.

21. **Mr. Sareer** (Permanent Representative of the Maldives to the United Nations and Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States), panellist, said that the current El Niño had had a major impact on small island States. Earlier in 2016 Cyclone Winston, fuelled by record-high sea surface temperatures, had killed at least 44 persons in Fiji and caused hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of damage. Significantly, the cyclone had taken an unusual path that meteorological models had been unable to predict. The Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau had all declared states of emergency as a result of some of the most prolonged rainless periods on record. Water was strictly rationed, which in some cases had affected the ability of fishermen to carry out their work, as they were not able to obtain enough drinking water to be at sea for the necessary amount of time. Small island developing States were disproportionately vulnerable to drought because they often lacked significant groundwater supplies and because it was difficult to deliver emergency water to remote islands. Desalination was an option in some cases, but it was expensive to carry out the process and deliver the desalinated water. The Government of the Maldives had budgeted $19 million to address water-related needs for the period 2015 to 2017 alone.

22. Oceans were becoming more acidic as they absorbed carbon dioxide emissions, leading to catastrophic coral bleaching. That was a cause for grave concern, as 90 per cent of the world's fish populations depended on the coral reefs and millions of people relied on them for food and income from tourism-based businesses.

23. **Ms. Falk** (CBS News) asked whether small island States had known that the 2015/16 El Niño would be the worst on record, what they had done to prepare and whether it was possible for those States to make adequate preparations for such a large weather-related emergency.

24. **Mr. Sareer** (Permanent Representative of the Maldives to the United Nations and Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States) said that small island States were in a dire situation in terms of capacity and preparedness, which was why the Sendai Framework and support from the United Nations system were so important. The Sendai Framework, the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement should provide a blueprint for the provision of adequate support for States that were not fully prepared to deal with events such as El Niño.

25. **Ms. Falk** (CBS News) asked what economic, social and environmental impacts had resulted from the unusually dry conditions in Indonesia.

26. **Mr. Djani** (Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations), panellist, said that his Government had taken into account the lessons learned from its experience in 1997/98, when extensive crop damage had forced it to import huge amounts of rice. Thanks to significant efforts made since then to establish irrigation systems and construct dams, overall rice production had actually increased in Indonesia

during the current El Niño. However, certain areas of the country were severely affected by water shortages. Wildfires were also causing significant problems in the country, half of which was covered in forest. Much of the Indonesian forest was peatland, which was significant because while peat did not catch fire easily, it was difficult to extinguish peatland fires once they did start. His country had been able to cope with the current El Niño largely because its climate agency had been better prepared than in the past, primarily as a result of its close cooperation with partners such as the World Meteorological Organization. The country was currently preparing for a potential La Niña event in the near future.

27. International cooperation, including through the Sendai Framework, was essential for dealing with cross-border issues such as El Niño. Efforts must be made to ensure that United Nations agencies did not compete with one another but cooperated efficiently, drawing on their unique comparative advantages.

28. **Ms. Falk** (CBS News) asked what Peru had done to predict weather events such as El Niño, how far it was possible to predict such events and whether accurate predictions made it possible to mitigate the risks.

29. **Mr. Benitez Ramos** (Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation, Peru) said that while the risks associated with natural disasters could not be eliminated, they could be substantially mitigated. A team of scientists in Peru was continually studying the available information and making forecasts on the basis of data from various sources. The national disaster prevention centre had helped the Government to identify two million persons at risk from El Niño, and a Government operations centre comprising officials from eight ministries had then identified critical action to be taken ahead of the event, including acquiring machines to clean riverbeds and gullies, improving draining and sanitation systems in cities and enhancing the health care infrastructure. In addition, homes in tropical areas had been sprayed to protect populations from the mosquito that carried the dengue, chikungunya and zika viruses. As a result of that initiative, the incidence of dengue fever had been greatly reduced and there had been very few cases of chikungunya and zika in the country, despite the fact that the higher than average rainfall caused by El Niño had created particularly favourable breeding conditions for the mosquito.

30. Peru was in a unique position in that El Niño caused higher than normal precipitation in the tropical, northern areas of the country, resulting in flooding and landslides, while the mountainous areas in the south experienced drought. Water shortages had only affected 1 per cent of the country's arable land, but the impact was significant because that land was situated in the poorest region of the country. To prepare, Government had set up storehouses containing items such as water, medicine, food, animal feed and cold-weather clothing in strategic areas so that populations would be able to access supplies even if the roads were cut off.

31. **Ms. Falk** (CBS News) expressed sympathy to the Government of Ecuador in connection with the recent earthquake. She asked what Ecuador had been able to do to mitigate the negative impacts of El Niño.

32. **Mr. de la Cuadra** (Office of the Secretary for Risk Assessment of Ecuador), panellist, speaking via video link from Ecuador, said that in 2008 his Government had decided to move from a response-based approach to risk to a prevention-based approach and had accordingly established a decentralized national risk management system comprising risk management units from national institutions and public and private organizations working at the regional, national and local levels.

33. The 2015/16 El Niño had affected a larger area of his country than one of 1982/83, but the impact had not been as severe. As at March 2016, 13 persons had died as a direct result of El Niño. Heavy rain and flooding had caused landslides in several provinces, which had damaged 3,770 homes and destroyed 99. With regard to agriculture and livestock, crops cultivated on 3,280 hectares of land had been destroyed, while losses of fish and birds representing a cost of $203,530 had been incurred in certain provinces, including Galápagos. Shrimp harvests had also been severely affected. Damage to transport links also had resulted in difficulties in transporting food products to towns and cities in some areas.

34. **Ms. Mucavi** (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)) said that the current El Niño was one of the most intense and widespread weather phenomena of the past 100 years. Almost 80 per cent of the required $3 billion humanitarian response was destined to meet needs in the areas of food security and agriculture. Harvests in several regions of the world had failed or were expected to fail, while over 32 million people had

been affected by severe droughts in Southern Africa alone. Those figures were likely to increase in the coming months, in particular if a La Niña event should occur.

35. An effective response to the El Niño phenomenon required effective partnerships, as no single agency or Government could tackle the problem alone. Without concerted international support, the economic and social gains that had been made by many developing countries could be reversed, undermining progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Early action had been proven to save many lives and livelihoods at a much lower cost than action taken only after a disaster had occurred. For example, flood mitigation measures implemented in Somalia by FAO and the Somali Government at a cost of $1.7 million had saved around $6.8 million worth of maize. Given the importance of anticipating crises, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the World Food Programme had recently agreed to develop a protocol outlining steps to be taken collectively, within defined timelines, to ensure early and coordinated responses to future El Niño and La Niña events. She concluded by calling for immediate action on the international commitment to build resilience.

36. **Ms. Cavelier Adarve** (Observer for Colombia) said that ensuring that local governments were involved in coordinating risk management had proved very useful in Colombia and asked what the experience of other States had been in that regard. She also requested examples of good practices for improving the access of vulnerable populations to weather forecasts.

37. **Mr. Djani** (Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations) said that although disasters could not always be prevented, the international community could mitigate them and adapt with the right information. In addition to climate information provided by the Agency for Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics, the Central Bureau of Statistics provided data on crop conditions, malnutrition, poverty and other dimensions affected by El Niño in Indonesia. In a country that was composed of many separate islands, close coordination between the central and provincial governments was crucial. Local chapters of the relevant agencies had been established to coordinate with ministries. When addressing the impact of El Niño, the relevant Ministry played the largest part, whether the Ministry of Health, of Public Works, or of Environment and Forestry. Without coordination at the highest levels, efforts at disaster risk reduction and mitigation would be in vain.

38. To disseminate information at the village level and avert numerous disasters, his country had established an SMS early warning system for mobile phones. In addition, engineering students were required to spend six months in the field before graduating, helping to build up local systems such as drainage and irrigation.

39. **Mr. Benites Ramos** (Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation, Peru) said that his country had a relatively similar structure for disaster risk management that was divided up at the national, regional and local levels. As El Niño would affect 14 regions in Peru, the relevant ministries had established a local presence in at-risk regions. Regional governments were also involved to collect and address the demands of thousands of local villages. Emphasis was placed on regional governments to engage in highly complex coordination with many smaller actors and achieve better synergy. His country had consequently been able to develop a concrete and decentralized plan for disaster risk management.

40. Translating complex scientific information to the public was a complicated task. His country was developing a website, *Prepárate Perú*, to communicate with the population. On the website, the public could check on the progress of El Niño, see which zones were most at risk and receive information on road closures and planned detours.

41. **Mr. Kassa** (Commissioner for Disaster Risk Management, Ethiopia) described the organizational structure of his country's disaster risk management system, which included coordination between relevant land ministries, United Nations agencies, bilateral organizations, local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). All resources were channelled through the coordination mechanism and existing government structures.

42. In terms of data, his country possessed the necessary information to engage in risk-informed decision-making. The National Meteorological Agency gathered information from international satellites and triangulated it with existing conditions on the ground.

With regard to rapid onset disasters, the floods following droughts were a frequent problem in Ethiopia. The country had established a risk-profiling mechanism at the district level to reduce the risk of disaster. It was necessary to identify the appropriate early warning systems and development interventions based on local context needs and the specific hazards affecting a district.

43. **Mr. de la Cuadra** (Office of the Secretary for Risk Management, Ecuador) responding via video link, said that in his country, every province and institution that participated in disaster risk reduction and mitigation shared the same information. While early warning systems were fundamental, they were sometimes insufficient to deal with threats like El Niño. As the recent earthquake in his country had revealed, the system in place must still be improved to respond to emergencies.

44. **Mr. Sareer** (Permanent Representative of the Maldives to the United Nations and Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States) said that most small island developing States were prepared for disaster risk management. Owing to the growing severity of natural disasters, its remoteness, small size and limited financial, physical and human resources, however, the Maldives often faced extreme difficulties in responding to such events. Moreover, climate events were frequent occurrences for small island developing States, thus leaving them with very little time to recover and develop stronger, more resilient infrastructure. In the recent past, climate events had devastated many islands, thus hindering their economic development.

45. The 2004 tsunami had been a wake-up call for the Maldives, which had since improved its emergency response mechanisms and developed SMS information-sharing technology to reach the more remote islands. However, his country still faced capacity constraints and was therefore asking the United Nations for assistance in coordinating with regional mechanisms and networks.

46. **Mr. Tevi** (Observer for Vanuatu) said that in 2015 his country had been affected by Cyclone Pam, whose effects had been subsequently compounded by El Niño, ultimately resulting in a significant loss of agricultural production and tourism revenue. Vanuatu was therefore expecting economic losses for 2016. The biggest challenge facing small island developing States like Vanuatu was rapid disaster response. In order to gain response speed, partnerships were needed to enhance international cooperation.

47. He asked panellists to share their experiences with United Nations assistance in their respective countries, as well as ideas on how the United Nations could make the system more fit for purpose. It would be helpful to identify the three most important things to do when faced with extreme weather events.

48. **Ms. Ha** Thi Thanh Huyen (Viet Nam) said that her country was currently suffering from its worst drought and salinization in over a century; conditions that affected 20 million people living in the Mekong River Delta, the country's rice basket. She asked what measures could be taken to increase grassroots-level preparedness and local awareness, especially in a preventive and long-term fashion.

49. **Mr. Gonzalez** (Chile) asked what contributions and obstacles with regard to national capacity-building and disaster risk management for the El Niño and La Niña phenomena were addressed by the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

50. **Mr. Krapp** (Germany) said that as a donor country, Germany was very concerned about the serious consequences of the 2015/16 El Niño phenomenon. Adverse climate events required concerted humanitarian assistance and long-term resilience building. Germany had already provided over $100 million in urgent humanitarian assistance for the impact of El Niño through direct funding as well as its partner organizations.

51. His Government prioritized its emergency assistance for East and Southern Africa, where El Niño events had catastrophic consequences for local food and water supply. It also provided an average of $45 million per year to the Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF) and supported a number of resilience programmes in the Horn of Africa.

52. Several lessons could be drawn from the impact of the 2015/16 El Niño. First, early action systems still needed improvement, as well as broad adoption as standard practice. His delegation supported the Red Cross- Red Crescent forecast-based financing pilot projects, through which early preparedness action was funded as forecasts were released, but before disaster struck. Second, it was crucial to strengthen resilience, including through social protection and climate-smart agricultural approaches. Third, as food security and

disaster risk vulnerability were connected, it was advisable to invest in the former to reduce the latter.

53. He asked how the New Urban Agenda could build up preparedness and long-term resilience against El Niño. It was the world's common moral and political responsibility to tackle the disastrous consequences of El Niño collectively.

54. **Mr. Kassa** (Commissioner for Disaster Risk Management, Ethiopia) said that regarding long-term intervention, it was better to support disaster risk reduction before disasters struck. One successful example of how to eliminate the root causes of disaster and mitigate the adverse effects of El Niño was his country's Productive Safety Net Programme, which focused on soil and water conservation, small-scale irrigation, water harvesting, water skin development, infrastructure development and social service construction.

55. United Nations agencies and their partners should invest the majority of their resources for disaster risk reduction as indicated in the Sendai Framework. With regard to El Niño in particular, it was necessary to invest more in recovery. Specifically, his country needed emergency seed supplies and a restocking programme for its livestock sector.

56. Disaster preparedness and awareness was crucial at all levels, including locally and regionally. Ethiopia possessed grain reserves and food stockpiles to address rapid onset disasters such as floods and forest fires. As it was likely that the El Niño phenomenon would continue to occur as climate change unfolded, and there was a 42 to 50 per cent probability of La Niña occurring in 2016, United Nations partners must invest in the Green Climate Fund.

57. **Mr. Djani** (Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations) said that preparedness and early warning systems were crucial, especially at the local level. Unlike tsunamis, for instance, which were real-time disasters, El Niños could be predicted and prepared for in terms of health, crops, farming methods, safe water supply, etc. Disaster mitigation should focus on health, social and economic consequences. Infrastructure was necessary for long-term reconstruction. His country was working to build 65 dams by the end of 2019 and had already built 6 dams.

58. At the Third Preparatory Committee of the Habitat III Conference, his country would present a proposal on coastal cities and villages, which were often forgotten when discussing urban areas but were very important in small island developing States, especially in the Pacific.

59. **Mr. Sohlström** (Sweden) said that alarm bells were ringing from the Pacific islands to the Horn of Africa, signalling a global emergency that the international community must address by reinforcing partnerships and support across the globe. Sweden had been one of the first countries to respond to the effects of El Niño, contributing $15 million to the World Food Programme (WFP) and more than $100 million as part of El Niño support more broadly. His country was simultaneously continuing to provide short-term humanitarian support and developing long-term programmes to build resilience and bridge the humanitarian/development divide.

60. He asked what issues should be considered when transitioning from short-term humanitarian assistance to longer-term development efforts.

61. **Ms. Gill** (United States of America) said that the current El Niño was the strongest in recorded history: it was driving families from their homes, jeopardizing incomes, triggering food shortages and threatening health and nutrition, thus endangering hard-won development gains. Thanks to new technologies and early warning systems, however, there was ample information about El Niño-triggered events, such as droughts in the Horn of Africa.

62. In the aftermath of the famine in Somalia and the drought in East Africa in 2011, followed by the drought in West Africa the following year, her country had committed to an earlier and more robust response to early warning signals and to better integration of its development emergency programmes to address the underlying vulnerabilities that caused weather-related shocks.

63. However, the gap between the funding required to respond to El Niño and what had been provided remained too large. The United States had already provided $500 million globally, with plans for providing further assistance. The international community must do more, however, especially with regard to the urgent crisis in Ethiopia. There was a small window of time to distribute seeds and provide agricultural support before the next planting season. Without that assistance, the recovery of vulnerable communities would be delayed; many communities

would remain dependent on food assistance, which would drive up humanitarian costs. Her country was also planning to provide humanitarian aid in Southern Africa, as well as interventions to transition vulnerable populations from food assistance to sustainable and resilient livelihoods.

64. **Mr. Barnston** (Chief Forecaster, The International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI), Earth Institute, Columbia University) said that the current El Niño was the strongest ever recorded in terms of ocean temperature, although according to atmospheric and other oceanic measurements, the 1997 El Niño had been somewhat more powerful. Nonetheless, the current El Niño was a monster and there was a 60 to 70 per cent likelihood that a La Niña event would occur in the late summer and fall of 2016.

65. **Ms. Falk** (CBS News) asked why weather forecasting was somewhat predictable but early warnings for El Niño and La Niña weather events were not as predictable.

66. **Mr. Barnston** (Chief Forecaster, The International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI), Earth Institute, Columbia University) said that there was a significant difference between weather and climate forecasting. Climate was the average of the weather over an extended time period (longer than one month). Accurate weather forecasts could be obtained by feeding current conditions (humidity, temperature, etc.) into a model that extrapolated physical equations for the subsequent six to ten days. After two weeks, weather forecasting lost almost all accuracy. For climate forecasts, the subtle but consistent influence of boundary conditions around the globe was examined: ocean temperatures, soil moisture levels, and snow cover. Such large-scale factors could provide a six-month climate forecast or longer. The main boundary condition for forecasting El Niño and La Niña events was the temperature of the ocean. The events as a whole could be predicted by examining average ocean temperatures, although such forecasts would not be able to predict on what exact days droughts and floods would be the worst.

67. **Mr. Morales López** (Observer for Colombia) said that the effects of the most intense El Niño in history had been felt in Colombia and throughout Latin America. The devastating economic, social and environmental consequences of the global phenomenon were an incentive to promote better risk preparedness.

68. All regions of Colombia had been affected, with some areas suffering a 70 per cent reduction in rainfall and significantly reduced water availability for human consumption, agriculture and energy production. Around 2.4 million people had been affected and over 630,000 hectares of crops had been destroyed. Between January and October of 2015, approximately 16.6 million people in Latin America had been directly affected by the drought or subsequent flooding caused by El Niño. In Central America, more than 3.5 million required humanitarian assistance on account of lost crops; Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador were experiencing their worst drought in decades, which posed a serious threat to the food security of their populations.

69. Colombia had already invested over $530 million in contingency plans to respond to El Niño. Its national contingency plan was comprised of four stages: preparation and readiness; early warning; recovery; and assessment involving all relevant sectors of Government as well as local communities.

70. It was necessary to implement the Paris Agreement in order to prevent the El Niño and La Niña phenomena from further intensifying. The first opportunity to be seized should be the 2016 United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Ecuador. The New Urban Agenda must orient the international community towards the creation of human settlements that were resilient to El Niño and similar phenomena. Cities, as well as the rural areas on which they were dependent, were an ideal space to mitigate disaster risk and strengthen the resilience of economic systems, productive sectors and ecosystems.

71. **Ms. Ordoñez Solano** (Honduras), Vice-President, said that Honduras was one of the countries most affected by climate change. As a consequence of El Niño specifically, her country had suffered a two-year drought in 2014-2015. That critical situation posed a serious risk to national food security and would likely cause an increase in migratory flows. Approximately 298 municipalities in the "dry corridor" had lost the majority of their crops and were experiencing an alarming drop in the availability of safe drinking water.

72. El Niño and climate change in general were causing an increase in natural disasters that forced the most vulnerable countries to dramatically change their production and energy use patterns. Her Government had used its own resources to deal with the emergencies caused by the new climate reality; however, the international community and the United Nations system must cooperate to help generate programmes to satisfy the basic needs of vulnerable populations and create long-term resilience strategies.

73. The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit in Turkey would be a timely opportunity to establish agreements and strategies to face the grave threat affecting the poorest communities in Latin America and the Caribbean.

74. **Mr. Van Der Ree** (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that his organization was concerned about how the productive capacity of communities was affected by climate-related events. It was essential to promote the resilience of workplaces through structural measures. The international community must work to increase business resilience and protect livelihoods and productive assets throughout the supply chains by integrating disaster risk management into business models and practices. Businesses and professional associations including cooperatives must work to ensure business continuity, especially in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. Resilience to shocks at the household and community levels must be increased by strengthening the design and implementation of social safety-net mechanisms, including those related to employment programmes to rebuild damaged physical infrastructure.

75. For example, ILO was working with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Pakistan to build productive capacities to anticipate disasters and later rebuild. ILO stood ready to support countries in the context of the effective implementation of the Sendai Framework. It would also disseminate to countries the Just Transition guidelines, a set of adaptable policy recommendations for environmentally sustainable economies and societies.

76. He asked panellists to describe their efforts to safeguard the productive capacity of people and businesses in affected areas, and their suggestions for concrete action in that respect.

77. **Mr. Sareer** (Permanent Representative of Maldives to the United Nations and Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States) said that small island developing States had developed a variety of disaster risk management mechanisms. Several had established risk insurance mechanisms that provided upfront financial assistance to Governments so that they could address other matters more effectively. The most established such system was the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility, an instrument that resembled business interruption insurance and provided short-term liquidity if a country was hit by a hurricane or an earthquake. A similar facility was being piloted in the Pacific.

78. Small island developing States had urged the United Nations system to expand its coordinated disaster efforts by assessing and executing appropriate assistance through partnerships. The Sendai Framework presented a clear roadmap for disaster risk reduction planning; it was critical to respond to the challenges posed by El Niño by implementing the Framework.

79. In order to better coordinate the United Nations system and overall framework of the Economic and Social Council, it was necessary to eliminate the silo approach and work towards coherence for long-term reform.

80. **Mr. Zamora Rivas** (Observer for El Salvador) said that El Salvador was one of the countries most affected by the "dry corridor" created by El Niño. His country was suffering from droughts followed by floods that were becoming increasingly worse each time El Niño and La Niña occurred. A vicious spiral was produced, especially for the poorest populations, as droughts devastated crops and then floods took away their homes and belongings.

81. There were currently 272 vulnerable municipalities in his country, 54 of which were in serious drought conditions. At the beginning of 2016, his Government had worked with WFP to identify the families that needed immediate and urgent food assistance.

82. He called on the international community to develop mechanisms to build long-term resilience for the dry corridor. With such recurring phenomena, it

was more expensive to repair than to prevent disasters. It was necessary to increase cooperation efforts to overcome the crisis that his country had not created, but whose effects it endured.

83. **Mr. Sandoval Cojulún** (Guatemala) said that 10 million people in Central America and the Caribbean were currently affected by El Niño. It was necessary to cooperate with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), national organizations and humanitarian and development partners to address the situation. Central American countries in the dry corridor had suffered from El Niño and La Niña year after year: emergency solutions were insufficient to address recurring phenomena. Stable, long-term investment in resilience strengthening was necessary to help people exit the cycle of hunger. Emergency aid only helped those affected by El Niño for a short time. If permanent investment was not applied to prevent such situations from recurring every year, it would be difficult to break the cycle of hunger that hampered development.

84. **Ms. Menabde** (World Health Organization (WHO)), said that while the weather effects of El Niño might diminish during the weeks and months to follow, its health impacts would extend throughout the rest of 2016 and beyond. The world was facing health consequences such as disease outbreaks, malnutrition, disruption of health services, the spread of mosquito-borne disease, and the interruption of life-saving medical supplies. It was crucial to manage such medical consequences, ensure continued access to health systems, monitor signs of outbreak, ensure access to safe water and sanitation, continue with vaccination campaigns, ensure the availability of emergency medical supplies, ensure the effective coordination of all response efforts and guarantee the implementation of effective national health contingency plans.

85. While her organization was grateful to donor countries, there remaining a very large funding gap. Of the $3.6 billion required for the humanitarian response to El Niño, the health cluster required approximately $185 million and WHO was requesting $151 million. That small but important share was required immediately. However, health needs would continue to increase and more money would be needed for resilience-building and preparations for the future.

86. The coordinated response of the United Nations system and greater funding was urgently needed with regard to the Zika virus crisis, as well as to consider the broader, long-term consequences of that and similar outbreaks. It was hoped that the United Nations Zika Response Multi-Partner Trust Fund would provide a rapid, flexible and accountable platform to support that coordinated response and mobilize the necessary resources.

87. Preparedness was vital: investing in the future would pay off by reducing costs down the line. More importantly, however, the human cost of delayed action was unaffordable. Whenever illness, injury or death could be prevented, the international community must take action.

88. **Mr. Lambertini** (Italy) asked how the issues of the small island developing States — countries whose very existence was threatened by climate change — could be better integrated into the international discussion and response framework.

89. **Ms. Joergensen** (World Food Programme (WFP)) said that the severity of the situation called for the scale-up of relief and humanitarian operations. In addition to responding to immediate needs, WFP was also investing in preparedness and resilience-building. The impact and cost of relief operations could also be mitigated through early interventions. In 2015, WFP had launched the Food Security Climate Resilience Facility (FoodSECuRE), which provided the flexibility necessary to release funding before disasters occurred, generally three to six months before a drought and several weeks before floods and storms.

90. Activities were integrated with resilience-building to the greatest extent. Participants in WFP programmes received training in climate-smart agriculture, such as water harvesting and irrigation systems, before qualifying for food or cash assistance. The African Risk Capacity (ARC) was one example of a group approach that lowered the cost of responding to disasters before they became humanitarian crises, and provided better services to those affected.

91. Only through multi-year funding could the long-term resilience to climate disasters of vulnerable populations be developed, especially in the most food-insecure communities and countries facing recurrent shocks. Multi-year funding was also crucial to ensure linkages between humanitarian and development efforts.

92. **Mr. Jiménez** (Observer for Nicaragua) said that the international community must work together to deal with the consequences of El Niño. Mother Earth was trying to communicate something very important. Many southern countries had been experiencing droughts for over four years. Central America was particularly affected, as it encompassed the "dry corridor" produced by El Niño, which had expanded to the coastline for the first time in 2016. As summers also lasted longer, agriculture was affected by insufficient water resources, the watershed not having recovered from previous droughts.

93. His Government had taken concrete actions to find long-term solutions and planned to build a number of water reservoirs. Food insecurity affected around 3.5 million people in the region and threatened the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially the right to adequate food and the elimination of hunger. Food security and nutrition had thus become an urgent global challenge.

94. Developed countries had a historical responsibility towards the more vulnerable countries; they must fulfil their financial commitments and work to build capacity to meet the threat posed by El Niño. Developed countries must also change their unsustainable production and consumption patterns that significantly affected the harmony of Mother Earth.

95. **Mr. van Oosterom** (Observer for Netherlands) said that a cross-sectoral approach to interconnected challenges was necessary. Countries should do much more to support disaster relief, as that was the first line of defence. Disaster resilience must receive greater support. After Sendai, his country, most of which was below sea level, had worked with others to start the Delta Coalition, which spread expertise to similar low-lying coastal States. The communities in the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa were especially vulnerable with regard to food security and nutrition: his country had pledged 8 million euros to assist those countries, placing a special focus on women, children and the elderly. It had provided cash and food vouchers as well as drought-resilient seeds for long-term assistance.

96. **Mr. Puley** (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)) said that the humanitarian response to the current El Niño event had been unprecedented. National Governments, with the support of regional organizations, the United Nations and NGOs, had successfully coordinated their efforts.

97. OCHA and its humanitarian partners had stepped up risk analysis, preparedness and response efforts, worked with national Governments and development partners to make early risk reduction and resilience investments, and advocated with donors for early and flexible funding. OCHA had convened six Member State briefings to support field efforts to raise the alarm and mobilize resources. CERF had allocated $115 million for life-saving activities related to El Niño in 18 countries that had concluded costed humanitarian response plans.

98. However, a critical resource gap was preventing the necessary scale-up and threatening to cut short life-saving programmes. Even once the pledges of $500 million were delivered, an alarming funding gap of over $1.7 billion would still remain. That figure was expected to grow as additional plans were concluded and new needs assessments were finalized. Although the El Niño phenomenon was subsiding, its humanitarian impact would continue to increase, with related food insecurity not projected to peak before December 2016. The situation would become even worse if a La Niña event were to occur in late 2016, arriving on top of eroded coping capacities.

99. Assistance efforts must be urgently scaled up before the worst-case scenarios became a reality. The international community must respond quickly to life-saving needs, but also work together to help people become more self-reliant, build individual and community capacity to respond to future shocks, and increase investments in disaster risk reduction ahead of the next El Niño or La Niña event, which was only a matter of time.

100. To that end, OCHA would work with donors and other partners to urgently increase funding for response and resilience efforts, bring forward planned funding, reprioritize development funds to reduce risks and build resilience, and find additional resources to cover funding gaps.

101. The World Humanitarian Summit would be a critical opportunity for the international community to change the way it managed climatic risks, including during the High-level Roundtable on Natural Disasters and Climate Change. OCHA was working with partners to develop an agreed set of actions that both humanitarian and development actors would undertake

within defined timelines once a heightened risk of an El Niño or La Niña event was confirmed, to ensure more effective and early action in future. Given the increased chance of a La Niña event occurring in late 2016, it was urgent to step up preparedness, resilience and risk reduction efforts.

102. **Ms. Falk** (CBS News) said that two recurring themes had emerged. First, the international community must accelerate the implementation of Sendai Framework in order to better address the El Niño phenomenon. Second, it must ensure that both public and private development investments were risk-informed, promoting further investment in effective, nationally compatible regional, multi-hazard early-warning mechanisms.

Closure of the special meeting

103. **Mr. Wu** Hongbo (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) said that the economic and social aspects of the El Niño phenomenon must be addressed in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda while leaving no one behind. In that connection, it was important to reduce the impact of extreme weather on key development sectors in order to help States achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Designing and implementing disaster risk reduction and management policies and strategies was also crucial to achieving the Goals on resilience. Now was the time to translate commitments into action and make States resilient in the face of extreme weather conditions. Severe weather events were difficult to predict, but steps must be taken to manage and control the damage they caused. The best way to reduce their impact was to come together and mobilize effective global action. For example, early warning mechanisms could be promoted through the global framework for climate services and development cooperation could be used to help build resilience and reduce risk at the local and national levels. He encouraged affected countries to share and exchange information with one another, noting that the Council could be used as a platform. The Department for Economic and Social Affairs continued to support Member States in the coherent and integrated implementation of the Sendai Framework, the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

104. **The President**, commending the affected countries and the United Nations system for their efforts to respond to El Niño, said that it was important to build on the lessons learned from previous El Niño events, since it was now known what preparations were necessary to minimize the economic, social and environmental impacts of the phenomenon. The key findings and recommendations from the present meeting would be compiled into a presidential statement that would inform a plenary meeting of the General Assembly on action-oriented recommendations to address the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of El Niño.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.